

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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R 311436Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6913

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 5684

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, AR, VT

SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 5672

1. IN CONVERSATION AUG 30 PAPAL NUNCIO TOLD POLCOUNS HE HAD RECENTLY DISCUSSED FRICTIONS BETWEEN CHURCH AND GOVT WITH BOTH PRESIDENT VIDELA AND GENERAL VIOLA. HE SAID HE HAD INDICATED CHURCH DID NOT WANT CONFRONTATION WITH GOA, BUT THAT LATTER MUST TAKE STEPS IF ONE WAS TO BE AVOIDED. FIRST, GOVT MUST STAY OUT OF CHURCH AFFAIRS AND MUST NOT JUDGE PRIESTS BY MILITARY CRITERIA. IF AUTHORITIES ARE SUSPICIOUS OF OR DO NOT UNDERSTAND ATTITUDES OR ACTIVITIES OF GIVEN PRIESTS, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH LATTER'S SUPERIORS--PREFERABLY WITH HIS BISHOP--BEFORE TAKING ANY OTHER ACTION. CHURCH DOES NOT SEEK TO SHIELD PRIESTS WHO MIGHT ACTUALLY BE INVOLVED IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES, BUT IT DES SEEK TO AVOID UNNECESSARY PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

2. NUNCIO SAID HE HAD RAISED AGAIN MURDERS OF A NUMBER OF PRIESTS--THE FIVE IN BELGRANO AND SEVERAL IN LA RIOJA. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, RAISE DEATH OF BISHOP OF LA RIOJA (SEE REFTEL) SINCE HE DID NOT HAVE ANY EVIDENCE TO CONFIRM THAT LATTER HAD BEEN MURDERED; ON CONTRARY, HE SAID HE TENDED TO BELIEVE BISHOP HAD DIED IN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT AS CLAIMED BY AUTHORITIES.

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BE THAT AS IT MAY, HOWEVER, HE EMPHASIZED THAT GOVT MUST CURB

THOSE WHO SEEMED TO BELIEVE PRIESTS ARE FAIR GAME FOR ASSASSINATION.

3. NUNCIO ALSO WARNED VIDELA AND VIOLA THAT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE IMMEDIATELY TO IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IF CHURCH-STATE CONFRONTATION TO BE AVOIDED. CHURCH'S STATEMENTS ON SUBJECT SO FAR HAVE BEEN MODERATE. IF VIOLATIONS CONTINUE, HOWEVER, CHURCH WILL HAVE TO TAKE STRONG STAND. ALL OF THE SOME SEVENTY BISHOPS IN ARGENTINA WILL MEET IN BUENOS AIRES END OF OCTOBER. IF ILLEGAL ACTIONS ON PART OF SECURITY FORCES HAVE NOT BEEN BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL BY THEN, GOA CAN EXPECT BISHOPS TO ISSUE STATEMENT ON SUBJECT WHICH WILL MAKE GOVT UNHAPPY.

4. IN CLOSING, NUNCIO EMPHASIZED THAT CONVERSATIONS WITH BOTH VIDELA AND VILA HAD BEEN FRIENDLY. HE SAID HE REMAINED CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE SINCERELY INTERESTED IN CURBING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND THAT WHILE SITUATION MIGHT NOT BE GOOD NOW, IT WOULD BE FAR WORSE IF VIDELA AND VIOLA WERE OUSTED. HENCE, NUNCIO CONCLUDED THAT BEST COURSE OPEN TO HIM WAS TO CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THEM, URGING THEM TO MAKE NECESSARY RECTIFICATIONS, BUT WITHOUT TAKING STEPS THAT MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO UNDERMINING OF THEIR POSITIONS.
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